

RANCHO SANTA ANA BOTANIC GARDEN

LEAFLETS
of
POPULAR INFORMATION

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PENSTEMON HETEROPHYLLUS AUSTRALIS

VIOLET PENSTEMON

Prepared
by

RANCHO SANTA ANA BOTANIC GARDEN
of the
NATIVE PLANTS OF CALIFORNIA

Santa Ana Canyon
Orange County
California

PENSTEMON HETEROPHYLLUS AUSTRALIS

VIOLET PENSTEMON

Scrophulariaceae

Figwort Family

A low spreading perennial forming clumps 1 to 2 ft. high and equally broad. Herbage pale green, lightly puberulent, especially on the inflorescence. Primary leaves opposite, linear, 1 to 2 in. long; secondary leaves fascicled in the axils of the primary ones, somewhat smaller. Sepals 5, lobes narrowly ovate with spreading tips. Corolla 2-lipped, 1 to 1½ in. long, rose-violet to blue with blue to lilac or lavender lobes, 2 upper lobes larger than 3 lower. Stamens 5, the 5th or sterile stamen reaching to summit of corolla tube, upper pair of filaments shorter, curved inward at their tips, lower pair of filaments similar but longer. Anthers 2-celled, sagittate, with teeth along the slits. Style about as long as the sterile filament, undivided. Ovary 2-celled, developing into a 2-celled, membranous capsule containing numerous dark brown seeds. Inflorescence a narrow panicle of 20 to 40 flowers.

Penstemon heterophyllus australis was described in 1924 by Munz and Johnston, California botanists, from specimens collected by Baker at Claremont, Los Angeles Co. The original P. heterophyllus described in 1836 by Lindley, an English botanist, from specimens collected by Douglas in California, probably in Monterey Co., is strictly glabrous in the inflorescence, has somewhat smaller leaves and broader sepals. The gross features of these two plants, as well as one or two other forms of P. heterophyllus are very similar and are ordinarily only of botanical significance. The generic name means five and stamen and was given because many of the members of this family have only 4 or 2 stamens. Penstemons are abundant in western North America. Many beautiful species common in California are to be found from the deserts to the highest mountains. The name heterophyllus means different and leaves in reference to the varied size of the leaves, while australis is a geographic term meaning south, as this plant has a natural distribution in Southern California.

Penstemon heterophyllus australis grows in coastal Southern California mainly from San Diego Co. to Santa Barbara Co., although reaching San Luis Obispo and Monterey Cos., where it merges with typical P. heterophyllus. It is a common perennial

in Southern California at elevations of 1000 to 5000 ft., scattered on sunny slopes in chaparral or occasionally forming stands in the open on burns or road-cuts. It chooses rocky, gravelly or coarse soil where there is excellent drainage and little competition by annuals and grasses. In the wild it blooms mainly in June, July and August, ripening seeds shortly thereafter.

Our strain of the Violet Penstemon was obtained from seeds collected in 1933 in the Santa Ana Mts., on a high ridge near Santiago Pk. Plants grown from that seed have since produced many crops of seeds from which have been grown many thousands of plants. Propagation is easy. Seeds should be sown in flats in the fall or spring. Germination requires from 2 to 4 weeks. Seedlings will be ready to transplant to small pots in about 2 months and should be set out in the ground 2 or 3 months later. Plants grown from seeds planted in the early fall will bloom the following spring, but do not attain full size until the following season. Violet Penstemon should be planted in full sun, in light sandy, or rocky soil, but it will also grow in nearly any garden soil provided water is applied only sparingly and good drainage is provided. Greatest profusion of blooms is produced in May and June under our conditions, although some flowers appear earlier and later.

Plants of Violet Penstemon make an ideal low flowering perennial for filling in among large shrubs. Under cultivated conditions the plants are comparatively short-lived (3 to 4 yrs.) but volunteer seedlings spring up around the parent plants each season if the ground has not been too deeply cultivated. These may be easily transplanted to new locations.

Flowering stems of Violet Penstemon are rarely over 18 in. long and are not so suitable for large bouquets as some other species, but they can be used to good advantage in small vases and last for several days.

Seeds and plants of Violet Penstemon have been offered for sale for many years. In some instances dealers no longer list this along with their California Native Plants, but include it in their general lists, indicating that it has won a place in the horticultural world on its general horticultural value.

RANCHO SANTA ANA BOTANIC GARDEN
Of The Native Plants of California.

Established 1927

In Memory of John W. Bixby

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Purpose: A scientific institution devoted
to the growth and study of the native plants
of California for their botanical, horticult-
ural and popular features.

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